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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000904

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [UK](#) [CA](#) [LO](#)  
SUBJECT: DEATH OF SOLDIER IN IRAQ MAY AFFECT SLOVAK  
DEPLOYMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

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¶11. (u) This is an action recommendation. Please see para 4.

¶12. (U) Reacting to the death of a Slovak soldier in Iraq on November 10, Prime Minister Robert Fico said over the weekend that the death would influence the decision of the Slovak Government about NATO's request to reposition its engineering unit in Afghanistan from Kabul to Kandahar. Fico said that Slovakia will have to be assured by NATO or other allies that such a repositioning would not "endanger the health or lives of Slovakia's boys". Fico's comments came after strong promises of support and security assistance to Slovak troops in Afghanistan from British and Canadian governments.

¶13. (C) Post believes the GoS could make a decision about whether to reposition its forces in Afghanistan very soon, perhaps as early as Wednesday, November 15, and in any event before the November 22 force generation conference. We are told that an advance MOD team now in Afghanistan investigating conditions for a possible move south will not return to Slovakia until November 15. The issue is not on the government's published agenda for the Nov. 15 cabinet meeting, but the government can change the agenda as desired.

We believe the British have provided all the information requested by the GOS, and that the only piece of the puzzle left is the advance team's findings. The Brits have told Embassy London that they see no signs that the Slovaks are resistant to repositioning their forces in Afghanistan, although they acknowledge the weekend's events may have simply not yet resonated in Slovak-UK channels. USNATO informs us that it has not heard anything new about the Slovaks' intentions since SYG de Hoop Scheffer's visit to Bratislava the week of October 30. All that said, we cannot rule out that the government will make a decision on November 15, based either on political considerations or a preliminary assessment from the team now in Afghanistan. We cannot predict what that decision will be, but PM Fico could use the death of the Slovak soldier in Iraq to justify a decision to keep Slovak soldiers in the relative safety of Kabul (Comment: we have heard one possibility that the GOS would keep them in Kabul but augment their numbers. End comment). A decision not to deploy south, combined with other recent decisions on pulling forces out of Iraq, and a significant reduction in the budget for the MoD, makes us concerned that the new Slovak government is moving farther away from fulfilling its NATO commitments.

¶14. (C) Action recommendation: Post does not want to miss the opportunity to influence a GOS decision on a move to Kandahar in a positive direction and will engage the GOS at the highest possible levels in the coming days. Post recommends

that the Department and Pentagon engage Slovak civilian and military representatives in Washington to emphasize the positive implications of a move south, especially given the critical importance of the road-building activities in which the Slovaks are engaged, along with the support the British have pledged. Post also believes a USNATO approach to the Slovaks, perhaps along with their British colleagues, would be helpful.

VALLEE